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Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 17 March 1997, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. BANTON

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS, COMMENTS AND INFORMATION SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 9 OF THE CONVENTION (agenda item 5) (continued)

Twelfth to fourteenth periodic reports of Bulgaria (CERD/C/299/Add.7; HRI/CORE/1/Add.81 (English only))

1. At the invitation of the Chairman, the members of the Bulgarian delegation took places at the Committee table.

2. Mr. SOTIROV (Bulgaria) said that document CERD/C/299/Add.7, which contained his country's twelfth to fourteenth periodic reports, had been prepared by State agencies in cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with the Committee's guidelines in mind. The report also contained information in response to the questions raised by the Committee during its consideration of Bulgaria's eleventh periodic report. Relevant information was also available in Bulgaria's second periodic report to the Human Rights Committee (CCPR/C/32/Add.17), its initial report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC/C/8/Add.29) and the core document (HRI/CORE/1/Add.81) submitted to the Centre for Human Rights at the end of 1996.

3. The transition towards a democracy related not only to the establishment of a new legislative system, but also to changes in ways of thinking. Although Bulgaria had achieved considerable progress in that area, it was unfortunately facing the most severe economic crisis in its history. The considerable politicization of Bulgarian society, the confrontation between the main political forces and government instability had been setbacks for the implementation of economic and legislative reforms and structural adjustment programmes.

4. In 1996, according to data from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, GNP had gone down by 10 per cent, inflation had reached 311 per cent and the value of the national currency, the lev, had fallen by 700 per cent against the dollar. Bulgarian National Bank reserves covered only half of the payments on the foreign debt due for 1997. The privatization rate had slowed down and large parts of the banking and financial sectors had collapsed. The situation had even worsened, as inflation had reached 392 per cent in the first two months of 1997. In addition, the sanctions imposed by the Security Council against Iraq and the former Yugoslavia, which Bulgaria had applied in good faith, had caused it to sustain economic and financial losses of over $6 billion. Regrettably, the international community had remained indifferent to that injustice.

5. The situation had led to a drastic decrease in living standards, considerable cuts in public spending and significant difficulties in financing public social welfare programmes. The average monthly salary had dropped from $120 four months earlier to the current average of $15. Prices of commodities, particularly foodstuffs, had been skyrocketing, and the overwhelming majority of the people were living under the poverty line. The deterioration of the economic situation had led the Government to resign in

December 1996, and under the guidance of the new President of the Republic, Mr. Stoyanov, the political forces had agreed that general elections would be held on 19 April 1997.

6. Tolerance had always been a Bulgarian national trait, but the all-embracing economic crisis had led some people to succumb to the exacerbated tensions. That attitude was understandable, if not justifiable.

7. Despite the serious economic, financial and political crises, the painful process of transition towards a market economy had not given rise to ethnic tension. After 1990 the minority rights of the Bulgarian Turks, the Muslim Bulgarians and the Muslim Gypsy community, including their cultural and educational rights, had been fully restored. Most of the Bulgarian Turks, Gypsies and Muslims had restored their original names which they had been forced to alter during the period 1984-1989. The Ministry of Education, Sciences and Technology had issued school textbooks in ethnic languages. In municipal schools the mother tongue of those minorities was taught through the eighth grade. Education in Turkish, Armenian, Roma and Hebrew was supervised by regional inspectors. The Government had also subscribed to the recommendations made by the Committee with regard to the national census held in December 1992. Every Bulgarian citizen had the right freely to declare his or her ethnic origin, mother tongue and religion.

8. He drew the members' attention to the situation of the Bulgarian Turks who had recently moved to Turkey mainly for economic reasons - the number of such migrants during the period 1993-1996 was estimated to be between 80,000 and 150,000. Most of them were living illegally in Turkey and ran the risk of being sent back to Bulgaria, which could aggravate their economic and social situation and jeopardize their opportunity to enjoy basic human rights and freedoms.

9. The protection and promotion of human rights had been a guiding principle of the Bulgarian legislative reform begun in 1989. Article 5, paragraph 4, of the 1991 Constitution stipulated that international instruments to which Bulgaria was a party took precedence over domestic legislation. They could therefore be invoked directly in the courts. At the same time, measures were being taken to update some laws and to ensure the strict implementation of existing legislation relating to the provisions of the Convention. Several laws had been amended since the preparation of the report; two had been adopted in 1996: the Radio and Television Act, which guaranteed the independence of radio and television programmes and prohibited censorship, and the Referendum Act, which enabled citizens to participate directly in the management of the State and the municipalities through national and local referendums.

10. Parliament was currently considering bills on amendments to the Code of Criminal Procedure and Code of Civil Procedure, protection of personal data and child protection.

11. The Constitutional Court played an increasingly important role in protecting basic constitutional rights and directly influenced the implementation of international instruments, including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

12. Some examples were Constitutional Court decision No. 7 of June 1996, in which the Court held that the State did not have the right to interfere in the activities of the media. In decision No. 21 of November 1996, the Court had declared several provisions of the Radio and Television Act of 1996 unconstitutional, referring inter alia to provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In 1996, the Constitutional Court had rejected the claim submitted by 94 members of Parliament on the alleged unconstitutionality of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms.

13. The division of powers and the independence of the judiciary were basic constitutional principles of Bulgaria's legal system. The judicial reform had not been finalized, however - the courts of appeal had not yet been established and the new Code of Civil Procedure and Code of Criminal Procedure not yet adopted - owing to the absence of a law on the Supreme Administrative Court. In addition, the judiciary also lacked resources and qualified judges. The crime rate was rising and the district courts were overloaded. Law enforcement officials were not always fully aware of basic human rights and the way in which all members of society should be treated. There were still sporadic manifestations of intolerance and hatred. It could therefore not be said that all the rights enshrined in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination were fully enjoyed. Nevertheless, the Government and society as a whole were taking serious steps to combat such manifestations and punish those responsible. For example, in the period 1994-1996, 75 disciplinary measures had been imposed on law enforcement officials responsible for human rights violations.

14. Efforts were being made by both State authorities and national NGOs to raise public awareness of human rights. Several ministries and public institutions conducted training courses for teachers, judges, prosecutors, police and prison officials, in accordance with the spirit of article 7 of the Convention. The previous June, a seminar on psychology had been held in Sofia for members of the police force.

15. Particular emphasis was placed on United Nations documents. After the Committee's consideration of the eleventh periodic report, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with the Centre for Human Rights, had arranged for Human Rights: A compilation of international instruments and ABC: Teaching Human Rights to be translated into Bulgarian and circulated among interested national public agencies, NGOs and educational and law enforcement agencies.

16. An issue repeatedly raised by NGOs was the "discriminatory treatment" of the Roma in Bulgaria. Indeed, with the transition to a market economy and the radical changes which the society was experiencing, the Roma were in a very difficult social and economic situation, and many of them were on the verge of mere subsistence. As mentioned in the report, hunger, poverty and lack of job opportunities had compelled many Roma to reassess their traditional values and norms of behaviour. Thirty-seven per cent of all crimes in the country had been perpetrated by Roma. As a result, there was a growing tendency among Bulgarians to move out of Roma neighbourhoods for fear of being subjected to thefts, threats or physical assaults.

17. The authorities were endeavouring to improve the social and economic conditions of the Roma and to provide them with opportunities equal to those of the other Bulgarian citizens. A number of projects were under way with the participation and cooperation of international governmental and non-governmental organizations. The Confederation of Roma in Bulgaria was increasingly involved in that process as an NGO represented in the National Council on Social and Demographic Issues. An intergovernmental group had been set up within the Council and had worked out a programme of measures to address the problems of Roma in Bulgaria. By decision No. 163 of 30 January 1997, the Council of Ministers had adopted that programme, which basically covered the following areas: unemployment and social protection of the Roma population; creation of favourable conditions for gradually resolving the housing problems of Roma; a policy of health protection for the vulnerable groups of the population; land settlement for landless citizens; and measures to encourage the education of Roma children and to promote the cultural activities of the Roma population. The programme would be funded at the national level and conducted in cooperation with international and national non-governmental organizations.

18. On the suggestion of the Ministry of Health, one of the main aspects of the programme was health protection for Roma. Activities were scheduled to be carried out in close cooperation with the Bulgarian Red Cross and a number of NGOs.

19. In its efforts to combat human rights violations and racial intolerance, the Government cooperated with various international NGOs concerned with human rights. The Government had informed Amnesty International of the measures it was taking to ensure that officials responsible for human rights violations were brought to justice. A number of meetings had been held at which high-ranking police authorities had been informed of the need for strict respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to ethnic, religious or linguistic minority groups. The Government intended to continue cooperating with the Committee and regarded the Committee's concluding observations and recommendations as an important part of the implementation of its human rights policies.

20. Mr. WOLFRUM (Country Rapporteur) pointed out that the serious economic and social situation Bulgaria was experiencing had repercussions on the implementation of the Convention. Although he welcomed the additional information provided in the core document (HRI/CORE/1/Add.81) and the pamphlet of the Department of Human Rights and Humanitarian and Social Cooperation of the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Situation of Roma in Bulgaria, February 1997), he regretted that those documents had been submitted late to the Committee. He welcomed the report's detailed discussion of the country's new Constitution (CERD/C/299/Add.7, paras. 3-7 especially). He would like more information on the laws mentioned in paragraph 9 of the report, especially the Law on Names of Bulgarian Citizens, the Law on Amnesty and Restitution of Sequestered Properties and the Law on Political and Civil Vindication of Repressed (Persecuted) Persons and on their implementation. Had Bulgaria's declaration under article 14 of the Convention been published? Was the Convention available in Bulgarian and in the languages spoken by the Turk and Roma peoples?

21. He referred to some of the questions raised during the consideration of Bulgaria's eleventh periodic report (CERD/C/SR.918, para. 26) on the distribution of the population, the situation of the Muslim Turks, the Gypsies, the Armenians, the Jews, the Macedonians, the Greeks and other ethnic groups and on the languages spoken by each group, its level of education, its social and cultural development, the number of marriages between members of different ethnic groups and the situation of the various religions in Bulgaria. He noted that the list of ethnic groups included in the 1992 census (CERD/C/299/Add.7, para. 92) was not exactly the same as the one given in the core document (HRI/CORE/1/Add.81). Some groups were not mentioned in either one document or the other and some were left out of both.

22. He asked for details on the percentage of the Roma population, which several experts estimated at 6 per cent. Some Roma allegedly told the authorities that they were Turks or Bulgarians. Why were the Pomaks not mentioned in the statistics? He doubted the justification of the Bulgarian Parliament's decision to cancel the results of the census in two regions because many Pomaks had registered as Turks. The Pomaks could be considered as a full-fledged ethnic group in accordance with article 1, paragraph 1, of the Convention and the Committee's General Recommendation VIII. He would like additional information on the socio-economic situation of the Turkish minority and on the implementation of the Law on Names of Bulgarian Citizens (para. 9).

23. It would also be useful to have more information on the Wallachians and the Karakachans (para. 92) and on the measures taken on their behalf. Although he regretted that the Bulgarian Government had not provided any information on either the Armenians or the Greeks, he welcomed the information in the report and core document on the Jews and would like to know more about the small group of Arabs mentioned in the report (para. 92). Concerning the Macedonians, who had not been included in the statistics since 1956, he asked the delegation why that group had not been recognized pursuant to article 1, paragraph 1, of the Convention and why the organization representing Macedonian interests had not been registered.

24. He welcomed the information provided on the Roma and asked for more information on the programmes conducted to improve that group's very difficult social and economic situation (para. 104). He found the information in paragraph 106 of the report to be quite disturbing and suggested that the Bulgarian Government should avoid generalizations. The fact that Bulgarians were tending to leave neighbourhoods where Roma were living might lead to segregation. Had the Bulgarian Government taken legislative or administrative measures to improve the situation of the Roma, especially in connection with article 2, paragraph 2, of the Convention?

25. The information provided on the Turkish minority was much less detailed than that provided on the Roma. In that connection he would like clarifications of paragraph 94 of the report. What did the Bulgarian Government mean by its statement that the housing problems of Bulgarian citizens of Turkish origin had been "resolved to a great extent"? What did the following sentence mean? Had property rights been restored or compensation provided? What percentage of the population was concerned? Were farms included? What had happened to the occupants of the returned houses?

26. Further information had been requested on the organs administering justice, in particular the right to security of person and protection by the State against violence or bodily harm (CERD/C/SR.918, para. 31). Comprehensive information had been provided about the legal framework and the courts, but less about the implementation of the system. He would like clarification of paragraph 33 of the core document (HRI/CORE/1/Add.81), which appeared to contain contradictory statements. Further information on the commissions was needed as well as on the work of the administrative courts. It was essential to build up the people's confidence in those bodies. He asked the delegation again about the question of prohibition of political parties formed on an ethnic basis (CERD/C/SR.918, para. 43), to which Mr. Koulishev had replied (CERD/C/SR.919, paras. 26 and 27). He asked again what was being done to increase the awareness by judges and the police of the problems of the Turkish ethnic minority (CERD/C/SR.919, para. 36).

27. Turning to the implementation of article 2 of the Convention, he referred to several cases which had occurred between 1994 and 1996, in which the police had committed abuses and brutalized members of the Turkish and Roma minorities. Such incidents showed that the provisions of the Penal Code and the Constitution were not fully applied when protection of the fundamental rights of minority Bulgarians were at stake. It would therefore be useful to receive information on court action taken in those cases.

28. According to the Commission on Human Rights report on the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination (E/CN.4/1995/NGO/17), there was substantial evidence that during 1995 the Bulgarian police and judicial authorities had failed to investigate acts of violence promptly and thoroughly when the victim was Roma. According to data of the Ministry of the Interior, during 1995 there had been numerous serious cases of human rights violations by the police against members of the Roma community, including 18 deaths due to police negligence. Penalties had been imposed on a number of police officers, but the police had generally refused to make investigative reports available to the public.

29. There had been numerous cases of police abuses and violence in 1996, primarily directed against ethnic minorities. It was therefore his impression that the authorities' efforts to guarantee the rights and freedoms of Bulgarian citizens and their integration into society regardless of ethnic origin, referred to in paragraph 24 of the report, were insufficient. In particular, there were serious doubts as to whether the provisions of article 6 of the Constitution, which guaranteed the equality of all Bulgarian citizens, were fully implemented. The police and security forces did not appear to be sufficiently accountable to Parliament, and the resultant climate of impunity was a major obstacle to ending police abuses.

30. The Government should actively seek solutions to that situation and ensure that the training of police officers included the study of and respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of the members of the different ethnic groups.

31. Regarding freedom to teach the Turkish language, according to the Ministry of Education there were 844 Turkish language teachers for 64,000 children, and teachers were training in Turkish universities under a bilateral agreement with the Turkish Government. That situation with regard to the teaching of the Turkish language appeared to be encouraging.

32. The situation was less satisfactory, however, with regard to the education offered Roma children, who apparently received inferior education, despite efforts by the Government, which had been largely unsuccessful in keeping them in school. The seven pilot schools designed specifically for Roma children, opened in cooperation with UNESCO, had had good results but were under financial constraints. The introduction of Roma-language schoolbooks had had mixed success. He hoped that Bulgaria would provide the Committee with further details on those questions.

33. Regarding the implementation of article 3 of the Convention, he referred to the Committee's General Recommendation XIV. The provisions of the Bulgarian Penal Code appeared to be sufficient as far as the implementation of article 4 was concerned. He would, however, like additional information on how the Penal Code was actually applied.

34. Since it was prohibited to form political parties on an ethnic basis, he was surprised to see such organizations as the United Macedonian Organization Ilinden and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, which were heavily ethnic in nature. He wondered on what criteria the judicial authorities based themselves to ensure respect for the principle of political pluralism in accordance with the legal provisions in force in Bulgaria.

35. With regard to article 5, he noted that discrimination in the workplace against minorities, especially Roma, continued to be a problem. High-paying or supervisory posts were generally given to ethnic Bulgarians. During military service Roma and Muslims were often shunted into units where they performed work unrelated to such service, in violation of the ILO Conventions; additional information was needed on that question. The right of the Roma people to social security and their right to own property also appeared not to be fully respected.

36. The Bulgarian legal system satisfied the Convention's requirements, and its implementation and that of the Constitution had been considerably improved, except with regard to the behaviour of the police forces and the integration of certain groups, in particular the Roma, in the workplace and the social security system.

37. Mrs. SADIQ ALI said that she would like additional information on the role of the Special Counsellor to the President of the Republic on Ethnic Questions and on the measures the Government planned to take to combat discrimination against the Roma and other minorities (paras. 23 and 24). She would also like to know what measures had been taken to combat acts of racial discrimination and xenophobia (para. 63) and what was meant by "persons violating the principle of freely entered marriages" (para. 66). In addition, she requested clarification of the meaning of the term "Muslims", which was used in the report concurrently with the term "Bulgarian Turks", and the term "Bulgarian Muslims" (para. 69). She also inquired how many of the more

than 300,000 Bulgarian Turks who had emigrated to Turkey had returned to Bulgaria and why the Bulgarian National Television was the only major medium that did not provide daily broadcasts in Turkish in the regions predominantly inhabited by Bulgarians of Turkish origin (para. 97). Lastly, she would like to know how paragraph 125 should be interpreted.

38. Mr. VALENCIA RODRIGUEZ emphasized the positive aspects of the Bulgarian report, especially the fact that international standards, in particular the Convention, took precedence over national legislation and the provisions of the Constitution. He noted with satisfaction that Bulgaria had made the declaration under article 14 of the Convention.

39. He was pleased to see that articles 162 and 163 of the Penal Code penalized propaganda inciting to racial hatred and would like further information on the penalty of obligatory resettlement in article 162, paragraph 5. He also requested more details of the racist and xenophobic attacks against ethnic minorities referred to in paragraphs 40 and 41 and how those responsible had been punished, as well as clarification of the - apparently unfair - application of the prohibition against establishing political parties or organizations on ethnic grounds to the Roma and Pomak minorities (para. 73). Additional information also appeared necessary on the current socio-economic difficulties, and he encouraged the Government to continue its large-scale efforts on behalf of minorities, with support from the international community if necessary.

40. Mr. de GOUTTES emphasized the quality of the report of Bulgaria, which had endeavoured to reply to several questions asked during the consideration of its eleventh periodic report, and had not skirted the issue of the racist and xenophobic behaviour of Bulgarian citizens exasperated by the difficulties linked to the serious economic crisis and insecurity.

41. He took particular note of the efforts made by the Bulgarian authorities to ratify the international human rights instruments, in particular the declaration provided for in article 14 of the Convention, and observed that the criminal legislation appeared to meet the requirements of article 4 of the Convention. He also took note of the remarks in paragraph 126 to the effect that eminent Bulgarian jurists were of the view that there were still inadequacies with regard to the protection of human rights in Bulgaria.

42. Since the Bulgarian delegation had acknowledged an increase in racist and xenophobic acts in Bulgaria, he had been surprised to read in paragraph 43 that four cases of incitement to racial hatred falling under the purview of article 162 of the Penal Code had been discontinued as constituting misdemeanours and that eight other cases had been considered as not involving racial discrimination. Were such irregularities due to the ineffectiveness of the judicial system or the citizens' distrust of the system of justice? Bulgaria's next report should contain additional information on complaints and convictions in that area.

43. Knowing how attached Bulgaria was to the principle of prohibition of political parties founded on ethnic grounds, he wondered at the strictness of the criteria used to determine whether political parties were ethnically based. Paragraph 73 of the report stated that although the Ilinden Party and

the Turkish Democratic Party had been refused registration with the argument that they were founded on ethnic grounds, others such as the Pomak Movement and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms had been authorized (para. 100), and that Roma participated in political life in the country through parties represented in the Parliament. Did that mean that the issue was more generally related to political considerations?

44. He hoped that the Bulgarian Government would consider establishing a national human rights commission. Such a body would undoubtedly help to create social cohesion, for it would lead to cooperation among the representatives of the different components of society.

45. Mr. van BOVEN commended the Bulgarian delegation for the quality of its report, which was much above average. He associated himself with the various questions and observations of the other members of the Committee and was happy to note that the problems of citizens other than ethnic Bulgarians were being satisfactorily resolved.

46. The situation of the Roma had been presented so frankly that it appeared to be even more disturbing than had been thought. The Government seemed to be perfectly aware of the problem, but he noted from page 13 of the pamphlet published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the question that crime was 20 times higher among Gypsies than among Bulgarians. He did not contest that figure, but he found it rather odd for a distinction to be made between Gypsies and Bulgarians, as though the Gypsies were not also Bulgarian citizens. Such language ran the risk of encouraging the "negative stereotypes towards the Romas" mentioned in paragraph 107 of the report.

47. He had not been able to study in detail the programme for resolving the problem of the Roma in Bulgaria but the projected affirmative action measures appeared to be in conformity with article 1, paragraph 4, and article 2, paragraph 2, of the Convention. The question of Roma participation in political life in Bulgaria, however, might be given greater attention. As it was not likely that Bulgaria's current economic difficulties would enable the Government to find the resources needed to finance the programme, it might be advisable for the Committee to make a recommendation with a view to requesting cooperation from the international community.

48. Referring to paragraph 40 of the report, which spoke of a number of serious incidents that had occurred in Roma neighbourhoods in 1994, he asked what measures had been taken to punish those responsible. In conclusion, he said that Bulgaria's report was a document of high quality, and both it, the pamphlet of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Committee's concluding observations should be given nation-wide circulation.

49. The CHAIRMAN, speaking as a member of the Committee, stressed that the international community and NGOs should cooperate with the Bulgarian Government to resolve the problem of the Roma. The Government could not make progress in combating crime without participation from the minorities themselves.

50. Mr. CHIGOVERA, referring to paragraph 4 of the report, said he wondered whether article 5 (4) of the Constitution meant that the State was bound by the Constitution to incorporate the Convention into national legislation. He also found that article 44 (2) of the Constitution, which prohibited "any organization conducting activities against the country's sovereignty and its territorial integrity, against the unity of the nation, and trying to foment racial, nationalistic, ethnic or religious hatred" (para. 8), and article 37 (1) of the Constitution, which stipulated that "Freedom of conscience, freedom of thought and the choice of religion and of religious or atheistic beliefs, shall be inviolable" (para. 68), were somewhat contradictory. Reports by the NGO Human Rights Watch for 1995 and 1996 stated that one organization, the United Macedonian Organization Ilinden, had not been given permission to meet in memory of a historic Macedonian leader or celebrate the anniversary of the establishment of the Republic of Macedonia. The reports also questioned amended article 133 (a) of the Law relating to Persons and the Family, which governed the registration of religious organizations without indicating on which grounds registration might be refused. He wondered whether article 133 (a) was in conformity with article 37 of the Constitution, and whether the way in which the law was worded did not raise the risk of wrongful refusal to register non-traditional Bulgarian religious organizations.

51. Mr. ABOUL-NASR, reverting to the situation of the Roma, said he feared that the figures provided on crime, although they did reflect the facts, might be used to stigmatize the members of the Roma community. The question of the Roma had been neglected by the international community, which, like the Government, had responsibilities towards it. In terms of financing, in particular, international cooperation was indispensable, and he wondered whether the Bulgarian authorities had contacted certain organizations, such as the Council of Europe, in order to obtain assistance for conducting the projected programme.

52. He suggested that the Committee should take the initiative of recommending the establishment of a Fund for all the communities that had been victims of the Holocaust (in other words, also in favour of the Gypsies, who to his knowledge had never received the slightest compensation). Resources from the Fund could be used to finance programmes such as the one prepared by the Bulgarian Government for the Roma.

53. Mr. SHAHI said that Bulgaria had made commendable progress towards political democratization and economic liberalization, under extremely difficult conditions, and he was pleased to note that it had made the declaration under article 14 of the Convention. He also noted with satisfaction that a number of laws had been enacted creating guarantees for the restoration and protection of the rights of Bulgarian citizens of Turkish origin (para. 20) and that all religious rights and freedoms of those citizens and of Bulgarian citizens of the Muslim religion had been lifted (para. 95). He would like more details on the composition of the Muslim minority in Bulgaria, especially the Bulgarian Muslims mentioned in paragraph 69.

54. Citing article 11, paragraph 4, of the Constitution (report, para. 7), which stipulated that no political parties could be formed on an ethnic, racial or religious basis, he asked how the members of ethnic or religious minorities could exercise their political rights. No doubt they could join other parties. It appeared from paragraph 100 of the report that the Turkish minority was well integrated into political life in Bulgaria. In reference to paragraph 24 of the report, he asked whether religion was not a barrier to the integration of ethnic minorities.

55. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee would resume its consideration of the twelfth to fourteenth periodic reports of Bulgaria at its next meeting.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.